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Dvořák
Piano Concerto
Sviatoslav Richter
Bavarian State Orchestra
Carlos Kleiber



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Dvořák

Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 33

Sviatoslav Richter

Bavarian State Orchestra

Carlos Kleiber

SIDE ONE

1st movement: *Allegro agitato*

SIDE TWO

band 1: 2nd movement: *Andante sostenuto*band 2: 3rd movement: *Allegro con fuoco*

1873 was a year of great change for Dvořák. First there was the successful première of his choral *Hymnus*, which captivated listeners with its patriotic feeling and served to increase interest in a composer who was already reaching his years of maturity (he was born in 1841). On November 17, 1873, Dvořák was married. He temporarily (until 1874) had to accept the post of organist in the church of St. Ethelbert in Prague, but then in 1875 he received an Austrian government grant (which he received four more times) and from 1877 onwards he was able to devote all his energies to composition, to which he applied himself with typical tenacity. He struggled for acknowledgement, without giving up his sense of self-criticism and modesty.

During the first phase of his development (1873-77), in the seclusion of his modest household and ravaged by the tragic death of his three children, a consciously Czech national composer was born in him. The example set by Smetana was especially close and dear to him; we see this most clearly in his comic operas. But at the same time he came under the influence of Grand Opera and of Wagner. Similarly, his songs and choral works from this period bear the influence both of German romanticism in the Schumann and Mendelssohn mould and also of the vocal lyricism of Smetana's compositions. With his *Moravian Duets*, Op. 32 (1876), Dvořák's melodies, rhythms and style acquired something very personal — a spontaneity, freshness and classical purity of composition, that drew attention to the composer both at home and abroad. The publication of Dvořák's *Duets* prompted Brahms, who had been following his career enthusiastically since Dvořák's first application for a government grant, to recommend them as the work of "a decidedly very talented man".

At the same time Dvořák's composition of chamber and symphonic music underwent a process of stylistic purification and crystallization. The influence of Romantic music, in particular of the instrumental music of Schumann, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner and Smetana, was combined with that of Viennese classicism,

especially of Beethovenian construction principles, in the composition of chamber or symphonic music. From around 1875 this inborn tendency was also strengthened by the first traces of the influence of the neo-classical music of Brahms, discernible in Dvořák's choice of *genre*, as well as in the formulation of his musical language. These are, however, only the first manifestations of this influence, which made itself fully felt after 1877.

Besides the *Moravian Duets*, some of Dvořák's other compositions after 1872 were already of such artistic maturity that they, too, brought the composer into prominence. These include, in particular, the tender *Serenade in E major* for strings, and the Fifth Symphony in F major (both from 1875), which contains a brilliant image of the landscape of his native land and its people; the brooding and dramatic *Symphonic Variations* (1877); the String Quartets in E major (1876) and D minor (1877), and the *Stabat Mater* (1876-77).

Dvořák's Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 33, composed in 1876, is also among the most successful compositions of this early period and today is increasingly finding its way into concert halls and recording studios. It is also becoming more and more evident that the opinion that it is untypical of Dvořák, being strongly dependent upon Brahms and ineffective from the point of view of the soloist, which has accompanied its previous lack of popularity, is thoroughly false. We are now becoming aware of the fact that the rhapsodic and brooding nature of a number of passages in the composition are very typical of the thirty-five year old Dvořák. This trait brought him closer to the musical language of the likes of Beethoven and Schumann, rather than of Brahms, whom Dvořák did not meet until the end of 1878 and whose compositions he probably did not even know at the time. In any case, Brahms's orchestral compositions at that time included only his *Serenades*, First Piano Concerto and *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, while his First Symphony was played for the first time only on November 4th, 1876. (Dvořák himself, on the other hand, was already the author of eight orchestral scores, among them five symphonies!) Furthermore, Dvořák wanted to compose a concerto for a soloist who could help him on the basis of his artistic credentials. He considered Dreyschöck's influential pupil Karl von Sladkovský to be such an artist, and was not disappointed. It was probably this motivation, rather than the influence of Brahms's concerto, which led Dvořák to choose this particular solo instrument.

The dedicatee played the composition for the first time on March 24th, 1878, and did much to enhance the position of the young composer. The fact that the composer did not bow down before the virtuoso, but with great seriousness and consistency produced a symphonic type of romantic concerto, shows the extent to which Dvořák was true to himself. Until the publication of the score (in Breslau in 1883) he continued to improve upon the composition, although he was unwilling to change anything in its basic concept and expression. It was as if he were echoing Schumann's words, written in a letter to Clara: "I see that I am unable to write a concerto for a virtuoso; I must think of other things." The work represents a young artist's gesture, full of energy and vigour. The development of the first movement is full of struggle and the slow movement full of calm and equanimity, while the finale is a passionate pouring forth of the vocal quality of the music, expressing a true feeling for humanity and a seriousness of endeavour. At the same time we should, however, note other melodic and rhythmic aspects: the smiling Czech variation theme of the first movement, the simple emotional ardour of the *Andante* and the *capriccio* humour of the finale (reflecting the happy atmosphere of his home when his wife was expecting the birth of their daughter Ruženka), in which we can discern the intimate tones of Dvořák's "Slav" period, represented, for example, by his *Poetic Pictures*, composed a full thirteen years later.

This recording has several exceptional characteristics. It was produced on the occasion of the Concerto's centenary. For the first time the solo score is played without the stylistic changes subsequently introduced by Vilém Kurz and thus more precisely expresses Dvořák's approach to the *genre*. The soloist in the recording is one of the foremost living Slav pianists, while the conductor is an artist whose father, Erich Kleiber, was unforgettably linked to Prague and to Czech music and who thus understands Dvořák as few people do, on the basis of a natural family feeling.

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Recording Producer, JOHN MORDLER
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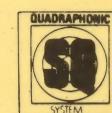
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1

DVOŘÁK
PIANO CONCERTO IN G MINOR, Op. 33

1st Movement: Allegro agitato
SVIATOSLAV RICHTER (Piano)
BAVARIAN STATE ORCHESTRA
conducted by
CARLOS KLEIBER

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2

DVOŘÁK
PIANO CONCERTO IN G MINOR, Op. 33
1. 2nd Movement: Andante sostenuto
2. 3rd Movement: Allegro con fuoco
SVIATOSLAV RICHTER (Piano)
BAVARIAN STATE ORCHESTRA
conducted by
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